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1837

1837

—

MY CONNECTION WITH IT

BY

THOMAS STORROW BROWN

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1837

AND MY CONNECTION WITH IT (1)

BORN in St. Andrews, Province of New Brunswick, I am a "good Tory," and not of a Revolutionary stock. My father's father, a Boston merchant, sacrificed his all for the Royal cause, and left for Halifax with General Gage, when Boston was evacuated, in 1776. My mother's mother emigrated from Postmouth to New Brunswick, with a daughter married to Captain Storrow, of the British army, from whom my name was taken. She was a "Wentworth," cousin to John Wentworth (afterwards Sir John, Governor of Nova Scotia), the last Royal Governor of New Hampshire; niece to Sir Benning, his predecessor; and granddaughter to John Wentworth, who preceded him. These three "Wentworths"—father, son, and grandson,—having governed New Hampshire for more than forty years.

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(1) This article was originally published in the *New Dominion Monthly*, vol. IV, number one, April, 1869. It is now entirely out of the reach of nearly all of our readers. We thought it proper to reprint it, as it contains some interesting particulars in relation with the Rebellion of 1837.

The *New Dominion Monthly* has been founded in 1868, and has subsisted, I think, until 1873. It contains several important historical papers by Bourinot, LeMoine, Rev. Rand, and others. The complete fyle is scarce and worth to be kept in record.—R. R.

When, at fifteen years of age, I came to Montreal, in the year 1818, I was already a politician from much reading of newspapers; but forming my ideas of what was right in men and things mostly from the lessons contained in "Plutarch's Lives." In the same year the Parliament of Lower Canada was for the first time called upon to make provision for the "Civil List," which included payment of all provincial salaries, in accordance with an offer made in 1810.

In those days there was no "Responsible Government" in the colonies, and no Colonial Ministry. Each had a House of Assembly elected by the people, a Legislative Council appointed for life by the Crown, and a Governor, who was some old military officer left on the hands of the Home Ministry by the Peace of 1815, and who knew little of governing beyond the word of command. The Executive Council, responsible no where, and to nobody, was a mere council of advice. That in Lower Canada became a controlling power. The representatives of the people could debate and vote, but there were no means of carrying out their decisions.

Our Parliament had at this time existed for nearly thirty years, with nominally all the powers of the British House of Commons; but in the long period when our insufficient revenue required that a large portion of the "Civil List," or expenditure for provincial purposes, should be paid from the Military Chest—that is, the British Treasury, through the Commissariat — the Assembly could hardly question the expenditure, or its particular distribution.

I shall in this article use the words "Canadian", and "English", as the French use them and according to our

common acceptation here,— the first meaning none but *French* Canadians; and the second, all who are *not* French Canadians. With the call upon the Assembly to provide for the Civil List, came the protest that culminated in 1837. The Assembly was Canadian, and, acting upon its positive right, demanded that all the revenue of the Province, should be placed at its disposal. The official body, including sinecurists and pluralists, being mostly English in numbers, and more so on the pay-list, instinctly foresaw reduction for their order. The Legislative Council, not a mere obedient appendage like the Legislative Councils of our day, or the "Senate", was a vigorous English body; and, taking part with the office-holders, put itself in direct antagonism to the Assembly. A great portion of the legislation demanded by the people through the Assembly was thrown out by the Council, till in the end there was an accumulation of over three hundred bills, passed by the Lower House, and thrown out by the Upper; and various governmental irregularities were committed, against continued remonstrances.

The constant demand of the Assembly for all the revenue, was met by tardy concessions by the British Government year after year, only to increase irritation; till in the end, as should have been in the beginning, all was surrendered. Then came the voting of supplies. The Assembly, having no other check on the Government, on the office holders, insisted on voting salaries annually and separately to each service or individual. The Governor, supported by the Council, insisted that they should be voted *en bloc*,—in a lump sum—and for a term of years, to be devided by the

Executive; and thus the conduct of public affairs became so insufferable that, in 1828, a deputation from Canadians (there had been deputations in former years) carried home a petition, signed by 87,000 people, which was laid before a Committee of the House of Commons. The Committee entered fully upon the question, gave the delegates a full hearing, and by a report sustained the House of Assembly in its allegations or grievances, but left the remedy in the hands of Government.

Promises of redress were profuse, but in the multiplicity of reforms required at that time of the British Ministry, ours were overlooked till 1835, when Lord Gosford, a good-natured Irish gentleman, of no political capacity or knowledge, was sent out as Governor, accompanied by an ex-captain of Engineers, and an excentric Indian judge to act with him as "Commissioners" to inquire into our grievances. The insult of appointing a commission to inquire into facts that had been re-echoed for fifteen years, when the Parliament of the Province could be the only inquest, was only equalled by the imbecility of selecting three men utterly incompetent for the task. The Commission was never recognized by our Parliament, nor did the British Ministry suppose it would be. It was sent out as a make-shift; and its reports, in which in turn each Commissioner differed from his colleagues, ended with the printing.

Lord Gosford, however, did something. He gave at Quebec a St. Catherine's ball, and, to the disgust of all loyal Britons, gave the chief place to a Canadian lady; which disgust was

amplifield by concessions of many things, before withheld, and a judicious bestowal of offices to certain Canadian politicians. On return, a portion of the Quebec wing of what was now called the " Papineau Party " split off, and desired reconciliation. Satisfied with what they had in hand, and promises of more, they declare that the cry for reform meant revolution.

To no party in a colony does the British nation, at home and abroad, owe so much as to the " Papineau Party", to which I had the honor of being attached. To no man born in a colony does the British nation, at home and abroad, owe so much as to Louis Joseph Papineau,—one who, by that spirit that in heroic times falls upon choosen men, towered gigantically amidst his compeers. Though here the stuggle was presented as a contest between the French and English, in other colonies it was distinctly between the people and the colonial oligarchy.

In 1837, there was chronic disaffection in every British colony, and each was besieging the Colonial Office for redress of grievances, having their common source in the contest of people, speaking through their Houses of Assembly, and Colonial Office holders supported by imbecile Governors, through an irresponsible Legislative Council. The unwavering determination of the Papineau Party forced questions to their ultimate decision; and the British Government, when awakened to the necessity, with a magnanimity seldom found in history, acknowledged the errors of the past, and noticed all the colonies that henceforth their own government should be in their own hands, and her authority never again be

invoked against their rights. From that time to this there has been no colonial disloyalty, discontent, disaffection, or complaint. The question in England then was, how shall we keep the colonies? The question now is, how can we shake them off?

The session of Parliament in 1836 was, like its predecessors, one of strife between its Lower and Upper House, and ended without a vote of supplies. We then owed no public debt; there were no public creditors, except the provincial officials. There was for their payment one hundred and forty thousand pounds in the provincial chest, but without the "vote" not a shilling could be paid; and, from the judges downwards, all were suffering for want of their "arrears".

Thus matters dragged till the 7th of March, 1837, when that great constitutional statesman, Lord John Russell, in the spirit of an absolute despot, introduced into the House of Commons a series of resolutions, authorizing the Governor of Lower Canada to draw from the Provincial chest this one hundred and forty thousand pounds, and pay off all arrears of salary, without waiting for a vote of our House of Assembly, which, vested so far as concerned the Province with all the powers and privileges of the House of Commons, had the sole control. Many members, who expressed the true Bristish heart, protested against such anti-British and unwarranted resolutions, and told us we should be a disgrace to the British name and to humanity if we did not resist them to the uttermost; but they were carried by a great majority in the House; and in the Lords, Lord Brougham was the only dissident.

Lord John, however, become frigthened with his own success. He said, in answer to inquiries, that he should not act upon the resolutions, but bring a bill. Though twitted by Lord Stanley—now Earl Derby—the bill did not appear; and in June, after the accession of our beloved Queen, he declared that, not wishing to commence the reign with so "harsh" a measure, he would *drop the resolutions, and add one hundred and forty thousand pounds to the army estimates, to enable the Governor to pay all the arrears from the military chest*, and wait the return from the province to a convenient season. And so it was done. The commissariat obtained the money by special bills sold in New York, and commenced paying salaries on the 12th of October.

But the mischief was done. The news of the passage of the resolutions set the country in a blaze in April, and the news of this wretched ending only reached us in August, when the fire was too wide-spread to be smothered. Had Lord John Russell proposed in March to borrow from the military chest, instead of to rob our own, there would have been no "troubles of 1837." Whatever may have been the offences of that year, his offence was the greatest, and he the greatest of all offenders.

Our organs, the *Vindicator* and *Minerve*, taking their direction from the philosophic democrats of the House of Commons, on the 14th of April, sounded the key-note,—"Agitate, agitate,"—and quickly came responses from all parts. Parties became arrayed in most violent antagonism. On one side were all the Canadians with the exception of a small

party in Quebec and a few stragglers, the Catholic Irish, and a few scattering English. On the other side were all the English, with the above exceptions, and some in the townships, who only in the county of Missisquoi made any great demonstration.

There being no Parliament in session, or likely to be called, the people could only speak by public meetings, which it was decided should be held by counties. Richelieu led off, under the impetuosity of Wolfred Nelson, on the 7th of May. Montreal followed on the 15th of May, at St. Laurent, to consider the means necessary to protect the rights and liberties of the people, and Mr. Papineau spoke for hours. Neither at those meetings, nor in any that followed in county after county, from May to August, was any revolutionary propositions adopted,—the whole subject of addresses and resolutions being a reiteration of the complaints of maladministration in the Government and neglect of our petitions, declarations of approval of the House of Assembly, and of the Papineau Party, and demands for redress. All that went beyond this was to use no article of British manufacture, and by the use, encourage domestic manufactures ; and so far as concerned other merchandize, to evade the payment of duties by encouraging the smuggling from the States, on the principle that, the payment of imposts to a Government, and the legal expediture of the proceeds by the Government, were reciprocal obligations, and that when the law was violated, the first was dissolved.

I had for years been a steady adherent of the Papineau Party, at a pecuniary and social sacrifice, inevitable to him

who is separated from those who may be considered his own people, and found in stormy times ranked with an opposing party, alien in blood and language. The reply to that article of the capitulation of 1759, which required safe guard for the Canadians was, " They are subjects of the King." In 1791, a free Parliament was granted to them, and it appeared to me that manliness in the British people forbade the withholding of any right from a handful of French descent, that the fortunes of war had left in British territory. I saw, too, in their pretensions, the same principle that had been consecrated by the triumphs of the British Commons in their victories over the " Prerogatives " in time past ; and felt that an instructive dread of French supremacy, which I could not share, alone prevented the entire people from making common cause against such a Government and Colonial Office as we had. There was someting excitingly chivalric in devotion to a cause where one had everything to lose and nothing to gain.

Coming into town in the morning of the 20th June, I met the late James Duncan Gibb, who informed me that Lord Gosford had issued a proclamation forbidding the holding of public meetings— or " Anti-Coercion Meetings " as they where called. " This," said I, " is more than British subjects can submit to. Not only will the county meetings already called be held, but we will hold one in Montreal ; " and this I repeated to his party, before reaching any one of my own.

An Anti-Coertion meeting in Montreal involved serious considerations, of riot and bloodshed, with which, in the bitter tumult of the previous ten years, our city was familiar. I

vehemently urged the necessity of defiance to the proclamation in Montreal, as encouragement to the country, which might consider us poor braggarts who only dared to show themselves where there was no man to oppose. Timid counsels had well nigh prevailed when, at one of our discussion, a young man in the corner, who I never heard speak in public before or since, came out so violently in favor of the meeting that none present dared to vote " No." The meeting was held on the St. Lawrence Market, on the 29th of June, and all passed off quietly. The English held an opposite meeting about the same time, but no collision occurred. They also held, during the summer, several meetings in the city, and some small ones in the country, to denounce the proceedings of the Canadians.

The meeting in Montreal, as I expected, gave new vigor to country meetings. Justices of the Peace and militia officers, as conspicious men, figured frequently as movers and seconders of resolutions. The Governor, through his Secretary, Mr. Walcott, addressed letters of inquiry to those persons, and getting back somewhat sancy answers, they were peremptorily dismissed. The Executive should never have noticed these demonstrations. An imbecile opposition only gave them greater consequence. The proclamation was treated with great contempt.

An active moving power in our machinery of agitation was the "Permanent and Central Committee", which held open sittings at the Nelson Hotel, in Montreal, attended by the ardent Canadians of town and country. Here every movement in all parts of the province was echoed and

applauded, and new ideas were sent forth for action elsewhere. Here, too, militia officers and magistrates who had incurred Executive displeasure were glorified; country notables, often made " Chairman ", went home elated with the honor, especially when seen in print.

Though the Gosfordites were strong in Quebec, Papineau was stronger in the neighboring counties, and one of the largest Anti-Coercion meetings was held at St. Thomas. Doctor Taché — afterwards the Premier, Sir Etienne, — was indicted for assaulting a man who at this meeting shouted, *Hourra pour le Roi des Anglais*, — " Hurrah for the English King " !

Our Parliament assembled in the middle of August. Gosford had in a manner, during the past two years, promised many unaccomplished things. He had no answer for old complaints, and the Assembly, declaring that the redress of grievances must precede all legislative action, separated without waiting for the hasty prorogation intended by the Governor. Thus ended the last Parliament of Lower Canada.

Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm of the district of Montreal, or the intelligence with which the questions of the day were understood. The houses along the roads we took to public meetings were decorated. Crowds stood for hours listening to speeches and resolutions. In going to the Napierville meeting, the train of vehicles behind us must have been over two miles long. On one occasion, when Mr. Papineau came from St. Hyacinthe by the way of St. Charles to Verchères, and up the river to Montreal, the

people turned out *en masse*, and conducted him from parish to parish.

Though so politically active, 1837 was commercially a hard year. Owing to a general failure of crops in 1836, wheat was imported from Europe to New York, to supply western want. Many cargoes from the continent were landed at Quebec, and some were purchased for Upper Canada. Nor was wheat the only article; even pork and butter were imported at a profit. All the American Banks suspended specie payment in May. Ours followed immediately, except the Bank of Upper Canada, which the Governor would not permit to do till some months afterwards.

Matters were not gloomy with leading politicians, who paused and hesitated; but the masses in their movement, headed by men newly warmed to public action, saw no barriers. Annoyed at the timid counsels that nearly stopped our Montreal meeting in June, I had projected a "Young Man's Party"; but met with no encouragement till the end of August, when I found that a number of Young Canadians had formed an association, called the "Sons of Liberty," to which I at once attached myself. It was in two divisions; the one civil, of which Mr. Ouimet, a young lawyer, was President, and our late mayor, Mr. Beaudry, Vice-president; the other military. The city was divided into "sections", the young men of each, being under a chief, *Chef de Section*, I was choosen general; and we speedily became the most offending of the offenders, holding frequent meetings, and marching in strong numbers.

I had, in 1836, commenced a series of letters published in the New York *Express*, over the signature of "L. M. N.", which, at first, presumed to proceed from high authority, were every where republished, and commented on like manifestoes of a party. They had reached the twelfth number, threatening armed resistance, and were now known by our party to be solely published by me on my sole responsibility. I was a constant writer for the *Vindicator*, and author of many "imprudent" articles. I had, perhaps, attended and spoke at more public meetings than any other man, and none had more to do with their organization. I was everywhere, day and night; one of the youngest of the actors, everywhere active, everywhere enthusiastic, everywhere confident. My hand was on the plough, and I looked not back. The Government of the country was at a dead lock. I saw no remedy but to push on the movement we were engaged in to its ultimate results, let that be what it might.

Ardent, devoted, desinterested, and fearless of consequences, with no emnity against any one, and no self-object in view, I felt impelled by a necessity that can alone be understood or appreciated by those who, in times of peril, find themselves forced into prominence. The course taken by our party was the true one. Thirty years' reflections confirms the opinion that we pursued a right course, and the only one open. We could not silently submit to Russell's resolutions. We could only protest by public demonstrations. They were legal, and we were, as British subjects, right in resisting their suppression; and when, in the end, illegal

warrants for high treason were issued, we were justified in attempting self defense.

Many magistrates and militia officers, who had not been questioned by the Executive for their part in public agitation sent in their resignation accompanied by letters expressing very determined opinions, which were published at length, as more aliment for excitement. Not content with these voluntary demonstrations, the people in many parishes forced others to follow the same course. About the end of October, sixty-six voluntary or forced resignations were sent from the County of Lacadie, with letters that, when published, filled a page of our newspapers.

The county of Two Mountains, guided by Girouard and Scott, the members, and Chartier, Priest of St. Benoit, had been particularly active from the beginning, and now held a meeting which, after declaring that the country could have no confidence in any person holding a commission from the Executive, proposed that magistrates or pacificators should be elected, to whom all matters of civil contest should be referred for adjudication.

The Canadian clergy, with few exceptions, resolutely opposed all public agitation. Never was there such severance between the people and their pastors. Monseigneur Lartigue, acting as bishop of the diocese of Montreal, issued a *mandement*, or pastoral letter, denouncing positively all agitation and agitators. A few priests refused to read it to their parishioners, or did so with an apology. In some of the parishes the men left the church when the reading commenced.

The greatest and closing public meeting of the season, was that of the " Five Counties ", held at St. Charles, on the 23rd day of October, which was attended by more men of superior position than any of the preceeding. The speakers were Papineau, L. M. Viger, Louis Lacoste, E. E. Rodier, and Dr. Coté, all members of Parliament, and myself. The resolutions, moved and seconded by men of highest repute in the District insisted on the duty of the British authorities to amend our form of Government; stigmatized the dismissal of officials; declared that there could be no confidence in their successors, which made the election of " pacificators ", as proposed in Two Mountains, necessary; protested against the English Government for sending out troops for the destruction of our liberties; disapproved all recent appointments of Lord Gosford, as evidencing and continuing a system of fraud. The organization of the Sons of Liberty was approved, and hopes expressed that Providence, and the sympathies of our neighbors—Provincial and American—would bring round a favorable opportunity for our emancipation. An armed party fired salutes, and a plan for the confederation of six counties was adopted.

There were no secrets nor conspiracies with the Papineau party, nor was anything committed till warrants were issued, to which the charge of high treason could attach. What was known to one was known to all, and to the world at large. There was no policy but what was expressed openly at public meetings; revolt was only the dream of a few over-excited men. There were no preparation, no purchase of arms or

ammunition, nor even a proposition to provide for attack or defense. The province was agitated to the utmost, and public clamor was incessant, but all in words, condemning the British Government for neglect of promised reforms, and approving the House of Assembly for withholding a vote of supplies, till our representations were acted on, and our grievances were redressed. The leaders were a noble band. Any one of them might, on any day, have sold himself to Lord Gosford for a good cash price, and certainty of honorable consideration, with his previous opponents; but none even wavered.

In truth the "troubles" of Lower Canada were nothing but a contest between two provincial parties, in which the Governor, representing the British authority, and the military men under him, *took the wrong side;* and the subsequent establishment of a form of government in accordance with the "well understood wishes of the people", that we since enjoyed, was an acknowledgement of error, and an honorable apology, though the merits of those who sacrificed most in devotion to right cause have never been recognized.

I have said that one division of the Sons of Liberty was "military". We called out members for parade, but there was no division into companies, or appointment of sub-officers, or arms, or "drill." In our public address we only called the young men of the Provinces to know their strength by organizing, and being prepared to assist for independence at some future day. In short we were only asking what the British and Dominion Governments are now asking by the militia laws. Our offence was in thinking too soon.

Our last public meeting was announced for the 6th of November, when we intended to adjourn till May. Our opponents were the "Doric Club", composed of a certain number of stout young "English", and all the other "English", who chose to turn out on days of tumult, with clubs in their hands. The Dorics posted placards calling on the loyal to "nip treason in the bud", by stopping this meeting. We had no mayor or city government then; the "magistrates" feared a deadly tumult. On their assembling I waited on some of them to say our meeting *must be held*; it was our right, and we would not back down under threats; that if collision came, it would be their fault; they must control their people, and I would control ours; they should not come with music, nor in bands, but singly as citizens, and so separate, if unmolested.

We met in a large yard, west of the present Ottawa Hotel. Our resolutions were mild enough; but before we got through, a crowd gathered outside St. James street gate, and some stones were thrown over. A good portion of our men passed out quietly into Notre Dame street. The remainder, under two hundred, I formed into companies, two deep, armed with stout sticks, which both parties then kept in readiness at their respective rendezvous. My orders were that they should cut their way through the crowd, and then scatter for their homes, for the troops and the big guns would be soon out. Opening the gates, they sallied in four columns, and rapidly reached the Place d'Armes; for this sudden onslaught cleared the street. Seeing all safe, I turned back alone. It might be called fool-hardy; but I was personally

on the best of terms with everybody, and when one has been for months in danger, he never thinks of it. At the corner of St. François Xavier street, a crowd was collecting with whom I exchanged a few words; and, on turning down the street, I was felled by a blow from a bludgeon behind, which was followed by others, with the cry, " Brown ! kill him ! kill him ! " leaving me senseless in my blood. In addition to cuts and bruises, the optic nerve of my right eye was shattered, and I have never seen with it since.

I was dragged into a neighboring house where a little attention, and the sewing or plastering of cuts soon enabled me to get home, and I remained confined there till the 16th. The English having destroyed the *Vindicator* printing office, were now in quiet possession of the city. The Canadians were snug in their houses, or at their various employments. Those noisy demonstrations that had continued night and day, ceased suddenly. Leading men were keeping out of the way. The first stage of agitation came to a sudded end, and all awaited the next development.

So general was the idea abroad that we were organized and ripe for revolt, that Mackenzie, who had planned a rising in rear of Toronto, and an attack on the Capital, sent an agent to communicate his designs, and learn ours. We had none, and not even a committee with whom the agent could consult. One of the few with whom he was able to communicate, much alarmed at this notice of Makenzie's unexpected intentions, brought this agent to my room for consultation. My friend taking me aside, said : " You know we are doing nothing, and have no designs for the future ; Mackenzie

should be undeceived, and dissuaded from his intentions." I replied that Mackenzie knew his own business, and should be allowed to take his course, which, result as it might, could only help us. What opinions the agent got elsewhere I know not; but the mission proved no hinderance to the Toronto move.

There had been a few arrests for sedition in the summer, which ended too farcically to be repeated; and Attorney-General Ogden was sent up to endeavor to get out warrants for high treason. Up to this time, there was no ground for such writs, and the judges refused to grant them; but two excited magistrates were found willing to assume the responsibility. These two hot-headed men did what the judges, partisans though they might be, feared to do, by reason of its illegality. There was no high treason in 1837, except that caused by resistance to these illegal proceedings. Writs were issued on the 16th November, and subsequently, that filled our gaol for the winter with prominent Canadian citizens, against whom there was, in reality, no charge. Martial law was not declared till the 5th December.

On the afternoon of the 16th November, I learned that a warrant for high treason was issued against me. Consulting no one, and knowing I could not leave the city, I passed down St. Catherine street to the horse ferry-boat, at the foot of the current, with no idea or intent to proceed direct to the States to recover my strength there, and communicate with my political friends, from whom I had been ten days separated, and who I presumed to be scattered in country parts.

Arriving at the Hochelaga horse-boat at five o'clock, the usual hour for crossing, I learned it would only go at seven, and then take over two companies of troops. Retreating hastily to a ferry-boat house, I tried to get over in a canoe. The ferryman would not attempt crossing. It was too stormy; and, to add to my perplexity, my carter declared his horse, having worked all day, could go no farther. An *habitant* returning from the market, offered to take me to his home at Pointe aux Trembles. I got first into the cart with too short rifles; the *habitant*, catching on the lock of one, as he got in, caused it to discharge, the ball whistling straight between our heads. A slight inclination of the barrel would have sent the ball through mine, and there would have been the "sensation" of a suicide, or a murder, as the reporter might think best paying. We faced a furious snow-storm from the north-east. The road then ran along the river. The *habitant* was very drunk, and fearing he would upset, I drove the horse. After ten days' confinement and appliances to sooth my wounds, this exposure was terrible, and the night I passed at the *habitant's* house was one of excruciating agony.

In the morning I walked to the village of Pointe aux Trembles, where all was excitement; but no one, except myself, had arrived from Montreal. Two boys took me over to the opposite island, where in a small house I went to bed, and spent the day. Sending for Dr. Duchesnois, I returned with him in a canoe to Varennes, and took supper at his house, with two of my *chefs de section*, Doctor Gauvin and Rudolphe Desrivières, who brought news of the attack

at Longueuil, by *habitants* under Bonaventure Viger, on a party of eighteen Montreal Volunteer Cavalry, which liberated Mr. Demaray and Doctor Davignon, who were being brought in as prisoners from St. Johns. I remarked:

"Then the ball has commenced. We must all take our places in the dance".

Gauvin replied:

"Yes; we will be chased no longer. Let us go to St. Charles, established a camp, and be soldiers".

Revived by the day's rest and supper, I assented. Gauvin, Desrivières, a brother of Desrivières that I had never seen before, and myself, set out upon our expedition. I gave one of my rifles to Desrivières. Gauvin, I think, had a pistol; and, thus armed and equipped, we declared for war, and established the first "Patriot" camp in Canada.

Those who have heard of the "Canadian Rebellion", or read the long debates of the period, or of fifteen thousand troops sent out to suppress that rebellion, at a cost of more than three millions sterling, may presume it commence with preparation and combination; but the beginning was precisely what I here relate, and no more. Leaving Montreal alone, with no intent but to take the shortest road to the States, stopped by a tired-horse and an over-cautious ferryman, accident took me to Varennes, where accident brought two of my city associates, and where one of them, without premiditation, suggested going to St. Charles. I bad been there once, and knew but one resident; my companions were

strangers. What could be more Quixotic than our design? Whatever might have been the offence, or responsibility of armed resistance, of failure or of success, it rests in no way on the people generally, whether leaders or led; but solely on the few who were actually engaged, acting upon their own individual impulses.

On the road, at a collection of houses and two taverns, we found a crowd of excited people.

" Why are the chiefs deserting " ? said they. " We have guns and powder, and can defend them ".

We were also told that Mr. Drolet, at St. Marc, had fifty men with muskets guarding his house; but arrived there soon after daybreak, we found neither men nor muskets. A servant man, roused from his sleeping-bench, opened the door. It was the large stone-house now occupied by the " Fraser." Mrs. Drolet, with her two daughters and youngest son, joined us at breakfast. A gentleman from Quebec, we learned, had passed up the river, warning all prominent men, especially those noticeable at the meeting of the " five counties ", of impending danger; and all were either secreted in the back concessions, or gone to the States for safety.

Crossing the Richelieu to St. Charles, we saw waiting for us on the bank two carts. In them were Mr. Papineau, Doctor Wolfred Nelson, Doctor O'Callaghan, and another, on their way up the river. They did not forbid our project. The coincidence in the meeting with persons so prominent, at this exact time and place, was most singular (our four names

were the first on the list for whom rewards were offered). Had I left Montreal with the intention of finding these gentlemen, I know not in what direction I should have gone, or when I should have attained my end. Nelson was making preparations for defence at St. Denis.

I went in a house, and lay down to rest. Gauvin, finding a sword, put himself at the head of suddenly-formed squad of seventeen men, armed with fowling-pieces, marched up to the manor-house of Mr. Debartzh, and took possession. Soon, a servant came with a fine horse, new saddle and bridle, for the " General " ; and I rode up to the manor-house, a large one story wooden place, now transformed into a camp, with sentries posted, and was addressed by all as *the* " General ". The appointment was spontaneous, and I had no other. My command was of my own creation. At any other time this would have been rather grand ; but, with aching bruises, a swollen head, one eye recently destroyed, and my jaws closing, to stop eating, it required resolution to maintain the position. This was Friday, the 17th of November.

On Sunday, there was no work done, for the Canadians on this point obey the commandment. On Monday we continued cutting down trees about the house, to form barricades to our camp, intending to cover them with earth ; but this was so little advanced that our defence had only reached the consequence of a strong log-fence, with no military or engineering pententions, when we were driven out. Two old rusty six-pounders, found in a barn, were mounted on sleigh-runners by the village blacksmith, and loaded, for want of other

missiles, with scraps of iron. These were our only artillery. Our fame spread abroad. The country people, supposing the time for rising had arrived, flocked in, without waiting for special orders. Never could I forget the alacrity and devotion of these men, coming forward, even before the call, to maintain the country's rights. They were the right material. With arms and officers, we could have improvised an army, off hand; but we had neither. In an old settled country, from which game had disappeared, a singular collection of fusils was in their hands, in all stages of dilapidation: some must have come down from before the conquest; and the whole would have been an interesting variety for a museum. There was, I think, but one musket; and I do not remember seeing a single bayonet. A few kegs of powder were collected, and cartridges made; but with such diversities of bore, I cannot say that every man got what he could use. There had been no general military organization or training since the conquest. Such had been the policy of the Government, and it now reaped the advantage.

By another of the coincidences of St. Charles, Mr. Blanchet, the parish priest, was a "patriot"—almost the only one in the province—and favored us. Mr. Debartzh's premises, well supplied with cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, and breadstuffs, furnished our commissariat. The whole country about us was "patriot", with a small exception. Simon Lespérance, a merchant of La Representation, and a few others, suspected of opposite tendencies, were brought in as prisoners by the neighbors.

Such was the camp at St. Charles. A few hundred men assembled, and thousands were ready to join;—a mere collection of individuals, without appliances, or instruction, or commanders, from corporals upwards, required for any action military. But such was not the newspaper report published abroad. There I had a strong, well-armed, and disciplined force, in a well-fortified position, with two of "Bonaparte's" generals under me, and a foundry for casting cannon!

Sir John Colborne, now commanding in Montreal, determined to attack this formidable army. Two expeditions were sent out,—one under Col. Wetherall, by the way of Chambly; the other under Col. Gore, by the way of Sorel,—to secure the capture of leading men, by an attack on both sides.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, the 22nd November, Col. Gore left Montreal with two companies of the Twenty-fourth Regiment, and one company of the Thirty-second (Markham's), and a small party of volunteer cavalry, with one howitzer 12-pounder. Two companies of the Sixty-sixth joined them at Sorel. At ten o'clock at night, the march commenced for St. Denis, eighteen miles. It was raining heavily, and the road was knee deep almost in soft mud; towards morning it commenced freezing, and a snow-storm faced the troops. Cold and exhausted they struggled on, Markham's company leading, picking their way, as they best could, expecting to breakfast at St. Denis, without opposition. The first files had nearly entered the village, when fire opened upon them. The howitzer, unlimbered at 250 yards, opened fire in return; but the troops taking

shelter round barns and houses, were too benumbed to handle their muskets. Markham, sheltered behind a long barn, twice rushed out to lead an assault, and each time received a musket wound, the last one very serious. Firing continued for a few hours, chiefly from the howitzer, and then the troops retreated to Sorel, leaving the gun behind as a trophy for the "patriots". Such was the relation made to me by some wounded men, who were left prisoners, and it corresponds with the official report. Had a dash been made in the morning, the troops would have easily carried it. Had the "patriots" followed the exhausted retreating troops, in the afternoon, possibly all would have been captured; but neither knew the weakness of the other.

Wolfred Nelson, one of the bravest of the braves, commanded at St. Denis. He had not raised the standard of revolt, but only defended himself against an illegal warrant. In war he would have been a great General; but perhaps a Murat, greater in action than in council. He had for defence only about fifty fowling pieces of any use; a small embankment across the road was a protection to sharpshooters; and the stronghold was a stout stone house, at the lower end of the village. Round-shot knocked in the upper gable,—there were three killed in the garret; below the rafters, the walls were too solid for injury. My most intimate friend, Charles Ovide Perrault, who had been one of the most active agents of agitation, and the greatest young man I ever met, was mortally wounded, while crossing the street, by an accidental parting shot.

One painful event marked the day. Lieut. Weir, of the 32nd Regiment, left Sorel to overtake Col. Gore's command. Accidentally getting upon a wrong road, he drove past, and on to St. Denis, where he was made a prisoner, as I was early informed by a letter from Nelson, who said he would be treated with every consideration. When the troops approached in the morning, he was placed in a waggon to be sent to me, at St. Charles (nine miles), in charge of two old, respectable men. At a short distance, he jumped out to escape; and, in the scuffle to secure him, was killed. No man lamented the sad event more than Nelson.

The troops lost,—killed, 6 rank and file; wounded, 1 officer and 9 rank and file; missing, 6 rank and file. The patriots had 10 or 12 killed.

Col. Wetherall was now halted at St. Hilaire, nine miles above St. Charles, with a brigade, consisting of four companies of the 1st Royals, a detachment of the 66th Regiment (another company of the Royals followed from Chambly), with two six-pounders, and a detachment of Volunteer Cavalry. It was doubtful if he would come further after the retreat of Col. Gore; and indeed, from his report, his advance would appear another accident. Reports, coming from we know not where, informed us that the "Patriots" were armed in rear of Montreal, threatening the city, and that Chambly, St. John's, and all the country from thence to the lines, was in our hands. Disappointment soon followed. On Friday evening, an American arrived from St. Albans, to inform that Dr. Côté and the leaders of the county of

Lacadie, with several of the prominent men from the Richelieu, from Montreal, and elsewhere, were there collecting munitions of war for invasion. Nelson and I thus found ourselves alone. Had our frontier friends staid at home, communication with the States would have been open for arms and munitions, which would assuredly have come in. The invasion from St. Albans was delayed too long. One day earlier it might have proved successful.

Friday, the 24th, was a beautiful day. A sharp frost made the roads good. Having more men than I could lodge in the camp, I proceeded with one hundred, and billeted them in farm-houses up the river; the advanced posts being at a small stream two miles up, where I directed the bridge to be destroyed and the passage desputed, and on a bank in rear, where I directed a barricade of fence rails to be erected. All were ordered to skirmish with any coming enemy by firing on the advance and falling back.

Still suffering from my old bruises, fitted for a hospital rather than for a camp, I had hardly got to sleep, about midnight, when I was awakened by a messenger from Desrivières at the barricade, to say he had made a good work and he wanted more men. I could hardly make a reply, when it appeared as if the whole picket was back in camp with a report that an enemy was upon us. It proved a false alarm, but only a portion returned to their posts. There was evidently a scare.

On the morning of Saturday, 25th, I inspected our forces; for, being collected from the neighboring parishes, their

attendance was somewhat irregular. There turned out in camp precisely one hundred and nine fire-locks, or, I should say, flint-locks, for many of them refused to fire, when essayed a few hours after. Just at this time, a man riding up delivered a letter from St. Mathias, opposite Chambly, informing me that Col. Wetherall had orders to fall back to Montreal, and was retreating. The after story was that Col. Wetherall did not retreat, because these people had stupidly stop the order from Sir John Colborne to that effect; and, moreover that I, who was eighteen miles distant, with Wetherall halfway between, was in command of them. Most of all, the man who was said to borne the order, told me in Montreal, seven years afterwards, that he was ready to make oath that he was not detained by my orders. He did not see me, but knew my voice! Such are the materials of history! Had Wetherall retreated, our weakness would have been undiscovered, and we should have remained masters of the south side of the St. Lawrence.

Anticipating no danger for the day, I set about improving our camp, and then rode down to the village, to make arrangements for grinding wheat. While consulting with Bunker, the hotel-keeper, at his door, a messenger rushed up to inform me that the troops were approaching; and, returning to the camp, I found that my pickets, already reduced to about twenty-five men, had all come back to bring the news. Putting myself at their head, I went up about two miles to reconnoitre, and from a slight eminence, saw the whole brigade, in strength, beyond our means of opposition.

Repeating my order to fire from behind the wood-piles that flanked the road, to delay their march, I returned to camp. My horse, making a sudden turn and jump, threw me, as weak as I was, over his head a good distance, on the rough, frozen road. The horse caught, I mounted, and proceeded. At another time, I should have required a hurdle for my removal ; but, when the mind's energies are strong, the body is at best a mere incumbrance. Its suffererings are unheeded.

In the camp, or might be best called our enclosure, there were about eighty men, who bravely took their places behind the defences. There were more, I knew, in the village, one-third of a mile distant. They must be hurried up. Without an " aide ", I must go myself, thinking the time abundant. The fields were covered with men, women, and children, flying before the troops, from their deserted houses, and the more terrified as smoke and flames shot up from barns set on fire.

The last many of my men had seen of me was hurrying from front to rear, as fast as my weak state would permit. Just as I was turning to get back to camp, a stout *habitant* breathless, in his shirt sleeves, came running from above, to tell me that he was sent by the English commander (" General Anglais ") to say that if we were dispersed, nobody should be harmed (This afterwards was carroborated by sworn testimony; and Col. Gugy, accompanying the troops, told me it was he who sent him). Supposing by this that Col. Wetherall was pressed by " Patriots " in the rear, and was hurrying to Sorel, I sought a fit person to carry

back answer that if the troops laid down their arms, they would he allowed to proceed unmolested. This cause a few minutes, delay; he had to run for a coat; and but for this incident that day would probably have been my last. I had reached the ravine, within one minutes' ride from the camp, when one round-shot after the other buzzed past me down the road. Musketry was heard, and men falling back showed me their broken and useless arms. All appeared to be coming. My whole duty now was to endeavor to keep them together, and make face on a new front. Finding this was impossible, —for many would break for their homes, and that I remained unsupported,—my " occupation " at St Charles " gone ", towards dusk, I joined Doctor Nelson at St Denis.

Wish such disparity of forces, the affair was soon over. Two six-pounder guns firing short and grape, and near four hundred muskets, made short work with the handful in our camp; but the manly courage of these Canadians was of the highest order, when they opened fire and stood their ground till thirty three were left dead ;—none wounded escaped. The names of all killed, which I have taken from the parish registers, do not quite equal this number.

The troops lost, by the return made, 1 sergeant and 2 rank and file killed; 15 rank and file wounded. The Colonel's horse was shot dead. The horses of Major Ward and Captain David (cavalry) severely wounded. They did not advance below the camp till the next day, when they came into the village, and picked up a few villagers to be conducted to Montreal as prisoners.

The published reports announced a long, hard faught battle : I had fifteen hundred men, but ran away before the action commenced ; and three hundred were killed on our side. A subsequent "official" report reduced them to one hundred and twenty-five. The first exaggeration was about ten times,—the last four ; and this, I presume, is a fair specimen of the truthfulness of what we read of "battles" elsewhere. I was told the day following by some people near St. Denis, who did not know me, that the "general" had sold himself to the English, and run away to the States, with all the Patriot money.

It may well be asked what we expected to effect with such wretched preparations at St Charles ? I can only answer for myself, that, seeing the determined animation of the people, I thought the leaders would remain with them, and the raising of the "Patriot" flag at St. Charles, would be the signal for a general rising ; that men and arms would flow in from the States, as into Texas; and that Sir John Colborne would evacuate Montreal for Quebec, leaving us all the country outside. Had there been the militia laws and military knowledge of to-day, this was easy. Then I thought we would in the winter send Commissioners to England, in mercantile phrase, "to make a settlement". Ours was simply a provincial war of factions. The "Bureaucrats" vanquished us, and the province had to wait a few years for a government based upon "the well-understood wishes of the people." Had we vanquished them, there would have been only a delay of a few months, with an immense saving to the British Government.

On Monday, the 27th, alarmed with a report that Col. Wetherall would attack St. Denis, the place was evacuated. Dr Nelson, the present Sir George E. Cartier, myself, and few others, passed the day seated very stupidly in a swamp, a few miles back from Richelieu. In the evening we learned that Wetherall was on the march back to Montreal, and the next day we returned to St. Charles and St. Denis. I had considered Wetherall's success at St. Charles of little moment, —only a "Lexington;" and, if favored by the usual bad weather of the season, his command would be made prisoners before they recrossed the St. Lawrence. On the contrary, his success proved decisive.

We continued at St. Denis with a small armed party till 2nd December, when, on the second approach of Col. Gore, there was a second evacuation. Dr. Nelson, myself, and four others, passed over to St. Césaire in the night to take the woods. At the end of three days we got separated. I escaped after various vicissitudes, through the States; my companions were captured. The five hundred pounds reward offered for Nelson's apprehension was paid; the same sum offered for mine still remains in the treasury. Soon learning the determination of the American authorities, I took no part with the "sympathizers." Leaving for the South, in the autumn of 1838, I only heard of that year's attempt at invasion from the States, at Key West; after my return from Cuba. In Florida I remained till the spring 1844; when, hearing that a *nolle prosequi* had, unasked, been entered in my case, for what reason I never knew, I came back to Mon-

treal, landing alone on the wharf; and, passing through the streets, shook hands cordially and indiscriminately with old acquaintances, friends or foes, as though I had merely returned from a long journey. Our angry passages of the past were all turned to jokes and good fellowship, and so they have continued. (*)

THOMAS STORROW BROWN.

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* I have the materials for a history of 1837, that, with the documents, would fill two volumes, which I may never have time to prepare for publication. That a record of many things, now in the lapse of time only known to myself, may be preserved, I have sent this article to the *Dominion Monthly*. It has been written off rapidly — the work of evenings and early mornings—in one week.—T. S. B.

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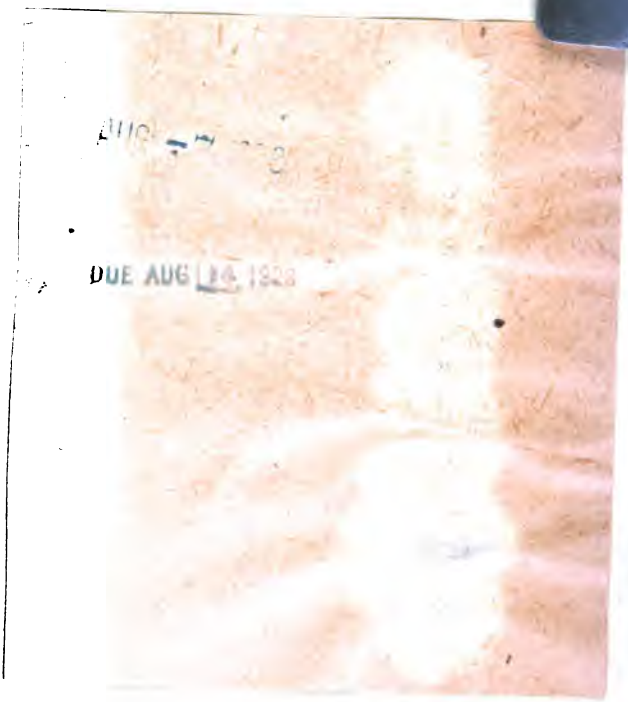
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